

JUL 18 1976  
CC: RKM.

## The Henry Adams problem.

760716

Bob Merton has asked me to articulate and record the personal factors in my development that may have some bearing on scientific output. I am reluctant to pursue this in great detail:

- 1) the documentary data and those available to conscious recall are thin, and the outcome may be of dubious reliability;
- 2) it would be hard then, not to embark on a program of psycho-therapeutically oriented reconstruction, a task not to be undertaken lightly or unprofessionally;
- 3) there are still issues of discretion with respect to the futures of other living people, including myself and Marguerite — how would I do this without

involving her; to exclude is to build a wall.

- 4) the utility of the enterprise, except as a way to record some random, unanalyzable data, is uncertain.
- 5) The Heisenberg effect - perhaps is most intrusive in the process of self-analysis [cf Anais Nin J.

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Yes, as part of this task I have spent several hours re-reading a diary that I kept between 10/1/44 and 2/24/46 - essentially the interval that I was at medical school. It has, however, just a scattering of entries after June 1945: precisely when I began to work actively with Francis Ryan on Transferring Neurospora. That is no accident: the diary is a product of my personal confusions and emotional turmoil; and my work with Ryan was a more constant two channel.

It is permeated with irony and private jokes on myself — which alone would demand meticulous editing and clarification for my intended meaning to be manifest. It doubtless (some day) will need a more detached analysis than I can give it to recover other levels of meaning.

Reading it was an upsetting experience: perhaps the more so because the last such effort — some years ago — was at the occasion of the most difficult transition of my life heretofore (the decay of my first marriage). In the net I am glad to have found the anticipation more troublesome than the event. Just writing now in this vein: the present commentary in the document, helps to lubricate the transition from living in 1944-45 once again, to looking back on it. And now that I can find some understanding of that ~~20~~<sup>19</sup>-year old without having to re-experience his torment.

On January 20, 1945 I have an entry describing my first reading of Avery McCarty + MacLeod, (1944) and its impact. The blurb was not an omnibus journal, but rather mainly a way of venting my deepest feelings; that it is recorded here is already witness to its importance as I perceived it. This is ~~also~~ measured still better by my subsequent actions: that I proposed to Ryan experi-



\* [NOTE: in 1941 I was 16. As time passed, I was catching up in age with new entrants to the group of graduate students; and feet here was a veteran of the place, apart from my own age I.

that it would have been impossible or very hard.  
However, by this time I was more and more rooted in medical school; other (personal) considerations were to lead me to give up my apartment at Morningside Heights in favor of the Bard Hall dormitory at P+S. So it is also conceivable that I might have started drifting away from the Columbia group, including Ryan, about a specific research program that stemmed from this event.\*

Harriet must also be given credit for being the ~~first~~ <sup>first</sup> person to respond to Avery's paper with a determination to become engaged with that line of work: by this time she was already planning to do her post-doctoral study at Rockefeller.

And certainly not about other people's.

As to b) I do not intend to elaborate. At 19 I may have been intellectually precocious, but this only made more agonizing my social and emotional inexperience. I had had almost no social experience with girls until I was almost 18, and was buffeted more than most when I finally did enter that arena. <sup>(c)\*</sup> My intellectuality led to intense introspection about my involvements; and this was ~~caused by~~

\* any recitation in this column has to be viewed  
psychically. It is simply my own  
reconstruction.

compounded by the discrepancy between an intense  
need for companionship, and an inability to make  
(or admit) the corresponding commitment on my  
own part. I was (intellectually) aware of my immatu-  
rity, and that it was an ironic rationalization  
to describe my own needs as "irrational". But I  
had no real help from others in ~~trying~~<sup>learning how</sup> to straighten out  
my life course — having been unable to learn very much  
about "how to live" from a family that was barely acclim-  
tured to America, much less the scientific profession,  
<sup>two corners of alienation.</sup>  
So, inevitably also there were many unresolved guilts con-  
nected with these social frustrations. My precocity<sup>\*</sup>  
had also isolated me <sup>from my age-peers</sup> throughout childhood (and beyond);  
and the psychodynamic sources of guilt aside, one  
should just recall that I had the privilege of being  
spared the draft on account of ~~my~~ a combination of  
my age and academic achievement: "so how will you  
repay that obligation?" (See attachment 1).

~~I suspect that there is some tie in between these~~  
The motifs might well be characterized as a neurotic  
impetus to intense work, to undistracted commitment to  
scientific endeavour.<sup>\*</sup> Having now observed other children,  
I wonder how much "precocity" is just intellectual  
advantage, how much this needs to be coupled with

\* For which I could get some resonance from a genre of contemporary fiction.

\* and unlearnedness  
in referring to  
Praw. (usually a term off)

or may perhaps be the progenitors of, neurotic compensations?  
[I do not insist that precocity is a necessary antecedent  
of later intellectual achievement; the ~~sub~~<sup>mind</sup> systems of  
the 30's probably did favor the precocious child. ~~The~~ The  
child who can talk (and study) like an adult obviously  
has some unusual capacities, but how far will they be  
realized by a child who is happy being a child? ]

The period of the diary was one of substantial dis-  
couragement also in my "research" on liver regeneration.  
I find, contrary to memory, that by October 1944 I had  
formulated a (still gratifying) sharp analysis of the issues  
{ I did not need to learn liver first }; but I did not  
have the judgment to see we would need far better facilities  
and institutional support to make serious headway with  
such a complex problem. To top that, I was spending  
so much time on my personal life (consider the  
diary on top of the reality!) I marvel I could get  
through my courses at all.

Perhaps '44-'45 was a crucial year of soul-  
searching in many ways, including the introspections  
that led to the exciting experiments on Neurospora and on  
E. coli. 1945-46 was committed to productive activity  
in research and coincided with some quieting of intra-

and  
genetic  
studies

personal conflict.

In March 1946 I left for Yale with hopes of expanding my horizons, and with a sense of leaving ~~behind~~ behind in N.Y. a set of not quite resolved problems. But I also left many non-problematic friends. I had a good chance to live the ascetic-scientist at Yale: indeed I even lived in the Tower over the Osborn Botanical Lab! Luckiness did overtake me ~~and I have no other way to~~ notwithstanding the heady excitement of the work that promptly flowed out of that effort. (In 2 months the first positive results; in 2 more the climactic presentation at Cold Spring Harbor). [where I met Esther Zinner]. I have no other way to account for having contracted a marriage <sup>within the same year</sup> as premises.....

that included in large measure a photo about  
the destruction and turmoil that had characterized ~~my~~  
'44-45 in New York.